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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 006096

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ETRD](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQ/KURDS: VISIT OF IRAQI PLANNING MINISTER  
BARHAM SALIH TO TURKEY

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR JANICE WEINER FOR REASONS 1.4 (b,d).

Summary

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1. (C/Rel MCF-I) During a late September visit to Turkey, Iraqi Planning Minister Barham Salih proposed opening a second Turkey-Iraq border crossing about five kilometers west of the Habur Gate. According to the MFA, he noted with concern increasing Iranian influence in Iraq and was critical of Syria for reportedly allowing some 2,500 extremists to cross into Iraq. He labeled the PKK a danger to Iraqi Kurds that must be disbanded in northern Iraq. The GOT will provide political training to 28 KDP members in October, but is growing increasingly annoyed at Barzani's behavior and recent remarks. End Summary.

Second Gate Proposed

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2. (C/Rel MCF-I) In the context of proposals to dramatically increase Turkey-Iraq trade, Salih proposed the opening of a second gate approximately five kilometers west of the current Habur Gate crossing into Iraq. The new crossing would encompass existing road and rail facilities in the area. In read-outs on October 6 and 7, MFA Director General for Middle East and South Asia Oguz Celikkol and MFA Iraq department head Avni Botsali told Emboffs the GOT promised to consider the new crossing but remained deeply skeptical. Opening a second crossing only a short distance from Habur would do nothing to relieve congestion at Habur, they said. Celikkol said the Turkish side offered to consider the proposed location if Iraq would also consider additional crossing points, including the one the Turks have been proposing for some time at Ovakoy, closer to the tri-border area. (Comment. For the GOT, the proposed Ovakoy crossing has the advantage of leading into a far narrower stretch of KDP-controlled territory. End comment). Salih was reportedly non-committal, saying he would consult with Baghdad.

Salih Sensitive to Iranian Influence, Critical of Syria

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3. (C/Rel MCF-I) According to Botsali, Salih expressed concerns about growing Iranian influence in Iraq. He was "aggressively critical" of Syria and claimed that, according to Saudi intelligence provided to the ITG, up to 2,500 extremists had entered Iraq from Syria. In Salih's view, Damascus cannot be unaware of this. Moreover, Syria still harbors wanted Iraqi Baathist officials, despite having turned over some to the ITG.

PKK Dangerous

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4. (C/Rel MCF-I) Botsali reported Salih was critical of the PKK as well, describing the terrorist group as a threat to the Iraq Kurdish leadership. Salih reportedly said a way must be found to disband the PKK in northern Iraq.

GOT Training for Iraqi Kurds, and Irritation with Barzani

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5. (C/Rel MCF-I) Celikkol and Botsali mentioned the GOT was preparing a political training course for 28 KDP-affiliated Iraqi Kurds for the second half of October. Celikkol said the GOT continues to be in contact with the KDP but is growing increasingly annoyed with comments made by Barzani and his behavior over the past months. He promised to provide us a list of Barzani's latest negative statements.

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